

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

ACDA-19 SCI-06 FEA-02 AEC-11 AECE-00 DRC-01 /165 W
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1538

INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USMISSION USUN NY

USMISSION GENEVA

USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6604

JERUSALEM FOR THE SECRETARY

LONDON FOR AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

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VIENNA FOR IAEA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MCAP, PARM, TECH, PINT, IN

SUBJECT: INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION: INITIAL DOMESTIC REACTION

SUMMARY: THE INDIAN PRESS HAS RESPONDED ENTHUSIASTICALLY TO THE MAY 18 NUCLEAR TEST. PAPERS REPORTED THE US, USSR, BRITAIN, AND FRANCE WERE INFORMED IN DELHI AND THAT THE CHINESE WERE NOT. STORIES EMPHASIZED INDIA HAD NOT CONTRAVENED ANY TREATY OBLIGATIONS AND THAT THE STEP WAS CONSISTENT WITH STATED GOVERNMENT POLICY. THE "PEACEFUL" NATURE OF THE EXPERIMENT WAS HIGHLIGHTED, BUT A FEW COMMENTATORS NOTED POSITIVE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA. END SUMMARY.

1. THE INITIAL DELHI PRESS REACTION TO INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION IS EUPHORIC. THE MAY 19 PAPERS, PRIMED BY GOVERNMENT RELEASES, GIVE BANNER PLAY TO THE TEST. "NATION IS THRILLED" IS A COMMON BYLINE. UNDER HEADINGS SUCH AS "NATION HAILS ACHIEVEMENT" PRESS REPORTS ENTHUSIASTIC COMMENT OF A WIDE RANGE OF POLITICAL AND SCIENCE FIGURES. THE REACTION OF THE COMMON MAN IN DELHI WAS SAID BY THE TIMES TO BE "WE TOO HAVE DONE IT". OTHERS WERE QUOTED AS SAYING THE DEVELOPMENT WOULD CREATE PRIDE AND CONFIDENCE AND FRESHEN UP THE ATMOSPHERE OF GLOOM IN THE COUNTRY TODAY.

2. STATEMENTS BY OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS PAID LIP SERVICE TO THE GOVERNMENT POSITION THAT THE BLAST WAS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES, BUT ALSO UNDERLINED THE NEED FOR INDIA TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS WELL. ONLY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST) STRUCK A SOUR NOTE, WHEN A SPOKESMAN SAID THAT IF THE RULING CLASSES BELIEVED THAT THE PREVAILING ECONOMIC CRISIS COULD BE HIDDEN UNDER THE "SMOKESCREEN" OF A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, THEY WERE MISTAKEN. RIGHT-WING JANA SANGH COMMENT WAS ECSTATIC BUT COMPLAINED THAT THE MOVE SHOULD HAVE COME SOONER.

3. IN A PRESS CONFERENCE WITH CHAIRMAN OF THE INDIAN AEC SETHNA SATURDAY EVENING, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI, WHO IS ALSO MINISTER FOR ATOMIC ENERGY, SAID THE TEST "IS PART OF OUR RESEARCH AND STUDY AND WE REMAIN DEEPLY COMMITTED TO CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PEACEFUL USES OF ATOMIC ENERGY." SHE TERMED THE EXPERIMENT "A GOOD CLEAN JOB" AND A "SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT BY THE COUNTRY'S SCIENTISTS."

4. NEWSPAPERS REPORTED THAT FOREIGN SECRETARY KEWAL SINGH SUMMONED THE HEADS OF MISSION OF THE UNITED STATES, USSR, BRITAIN AND FRANCE MAY 18 TO INFORM THEM ABOUT THE EXPLOSION AND TO ASSURE THEM THAT INDIA WAS COMMITTED NOT TO USE NUCLEAR

ENERGY FOR MILITARY PURPOSES. THE MISSIONS OF OTHER COUNTRIES WERE ALSO INFORMED, BUT THE FIREIGN SECRETARY DID NOT SUMMON THE CHINESE CHARGE.

5. MOST PAPERS QUOTED THE STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN'S REMARKS AND CHARACTERIZED THE US AS "DISAPPOINTED". THEY ASLO CARRIED AN AP REPORT THAT OTHER UNNAMED US OFFICIALS SAID THE DEVELOPMENT CAME AS NO SURPRISE SINCE INDIA WAS KNOWN TO HAVE THE TECHNICAL ABILITY TO PRODUCE NUCLEAR DEVICES FOR SEVERAL YEARS AND THAT IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF THE NEW

DELHI GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO SPEND MONEY ON MAKING A DEVICE RATHER THAN FURTHERING ITS OWN ECONOMY. JAPAN'S "PROTEST" AND PAKISTAN'S CONDEMNATION WERE ALSO REPORTED. IT WAS NOTED THERE HAD BEEN NO COMMENT BY CHINA AND THAT TASS HAD STRESSED THE PEACEFUL USES OF THE EXPERIMENT. THE TIMES OF INDIA CLAIMED IN ITS COMMENTARY THAT THE TEST UNDERCUTS THE THEORY THAT RUSSIAN INFLUENCE WAS INHIBITING INDIA'S ATOMIC POLICY AND THAT THE USSR HAD CAUTIONED AGAINST TEST EXPLOSIONS; IF THIS WAS THE CASE THE TEST SHOWED INDIA MADE ITS OWN DECISIONS.

6. BOI BACKGROUNDEERS APPARENTLY EMPHASIZED THAT THE EXPLOSION DID NOT CONTRAVENE ANY INTERNATIONAL TREATY TO WHICH INDIA HAS SUBSCRIBED. REPORTS NOTED THAT THE LIMITED TEST BAN TREATY TO WHICH INDIA IS A PARTY DOES NOT PROHIBIT UNDERGROUND TESTS AND THAT INDIA IS NOT A PARTY TO THE NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY. THE TIMES SAID INDIA'S TEST VALIDATES THE COUNTRY'S OBJECTIONS TO NPT PROVISIONS THAT PROHIBIT EXPLOSIONS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES BY COUNTRIES OTHER THAN THE BIG POWERS.

IT NOTED THAT INDIA WAS THE ONLY COUNTRY THAT PROCEDED DIRECTLY TO AN UNDERGROUND TEST. PATRIOT SAID THAT BY CONDUCTION ITS EXPLOSION UNDERGROUND INSTEAD OF IN THE ATMOSPHERE AS CHINA
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AND FRANCE HAVE BEEN DOING, INDIA PRESERVED THE NORMS DEMANDED BY ALL BUT NOT OBSERVED BY ANY OF THE OTHER NUCLEAR NATIONS.

7. MANY PAPECH REVIEWED EARLIER STATEMENTS BY MRS. GANDHI, SETHNA, BHABHA, SHASTRI, AND EVEN NEHRU, REGARDING INDIA'S INTEREST IN THE PEACEFUL APPLICATIONS OF NUCLEAR ENERGY. THE IMPRESSION CONVEYED WAS THAT THE TEST WAS ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH LONG-STANDING POLICY AND A NATURAL STEP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIA'S ATOMIC ENERGY PROGRAM

8. WHILE THE PRESS PLAYED UP THE PEACEFUL APPLICATIONS OF THE EXPERIMENT, LEFTIST " PATRIOT" IN AN EDITORIAL SAID THAT PRIOR TO THE EXPLOSION INDIA'S "UNTESTED NUCLEAR CAPACITY WAS BEGINNING TO MAKE INDIA APPEAR INORDINATELY WEAK SCIENTIFICALLY AND VULNERABLE TO ATTACK FROM ACROSS THE

OCEAN IN THE SOUTH OR FROM THE NORTHEAST." MOST PAPERS
NOTED THAT THE BLAST SHOWED INDIA'S TECHNOLOGICAL
CAPABILITY AND THAT INDIA HAD NOW JOINED THE NUCLEAR CLUB.
THE "SUNDAY STANDARD" CARRIED AN ITEM DETELINED WASHINGTON
WHICH COMMENTED THAT THE US HAD BEEN CONVINCED AFTER THE 1971
WAR THAT INDIA WAS THE STRONGEST POWER IN SOUTH ASIA,
"NOW THAT TOO CHANGES, INDIA HAS TO BE TREATED FROM NOW ON
AS A GLOBAL POWER". THE STORY CONCLUDED : "NO LONGER IS THE
WORLD'S GREATEST DEMOCRACY UNDER THE NUCLEAR GUN OF ANY HOSTILE
POWER".
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